

Message Text

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 NSCE-00 SSO-00
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O 112354Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7382
INFO AMCONSUL MONTREAL
ALL OTHER CANADIAN POSTS BY POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 OTTAWA 02421

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, CA
SUBJECT: NATIONAL ELECTION WILL NOT BE THIS SUMMER

REF: A) OTTAWA 2293; B) OTTAWA 2249

1. SUMMARY: PM TRUDEAU ANNOUNCED MAY 11 TO HOUSE OF COMMONS THAT NATIONAL ELECTION WILL NOT BE HELD THIS SUMMER. HE DECLINED TO SPECIFY WHETHER ELECTION WILL BE IN FALL OR NEXT SPRING. HIS STATED REASON FOR NO SUMMER ELECTION WAS DESIRE TO KEEP HOUSE WORKING ON SERIOUS PROBLEMS CONFRONTING THE COUNTRY. MORE LIKELY, DECISION WAS DUE TO ELECTORAL PROSPECTS. LIBERAL POPULARITY HAS SLIPPED BADLY DURING PAST SEVERAL MONTHS AND ELECTION POSTPONEMENT MAY BE INDICATION THAT PARTY BELIEVES NO UPTURN IS IN SIGHT. HOUSE SHOULD REMAIN IN SESSION THROUGH JUNE AND POSSIBLY LATER. PROMINENT BUSINESS SHOULD INCLUDE CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS ON NATIONAL UNITY. END SUMMARY.
2. IN ANSWER TO OPPOSITION QUESTION, PRIME MINISTER TRUDEAU ANNOUNCED TO HOUSE OF COMMONS MAY 11 THAT HE WOULD NOT CALL SUMMER ELECTIONS. HE CITED DESIRE TO KEEP THE
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- HOUSE IN SESSION TO TACKLE PROBLEMS CONFRONTING THE COUNTRY. IN RESPONSE TO FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS, TRUDEAU REFUSED TO BE PINNED DOWN ON DATE WHEN ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD. HE INDICATED THEY MIGHT BE HELD NEXT SPRING BUT DID NOT EXCLUDE POSSIBILITY OF NEXT FALL.
3. IN OUR VIEW, HARD ELECTORAL CONSIDERATIONS, RATHER

THAN HOUSE INPUT IN TACKLING COUNTRY'S PROBLEMS, WERE MORE LIKELY REASONS FOR TRUDEAU'S DECISION. MOST MPS, INCLUDING LIBERALS, WANTED ELECTIONS NOW. BUT SENTIMENTS OF TROOPS MAY HAVE BEEN OVER-RIDDEN BY ADVICE OF LIBERAL GENERALS, PARTICULARLY TRUDEAU'S CHIEF POLITICAL ADVISORS KEITH DAVEY AND JIM COUTTS. AS INDICATED REF A, LIBERAL STRATEGISTS WANTED MORE CURRENT GOLDFARB POLL SOUNDINGS BEFORE TRUDEAU MADE FINAL DECISION. FAILURE TO CALL ELECTION NOW MAY INDICATE THAT AVAILABLE DATA SHOWS LIBERALS REMAIN IN PRECARIOUS ELECTORAL SITUATION.

4. POSTPONEMENT, AND TRUDEAU'S FAILURE TO SPECIFY POST-SUMMER DATE FOR ELECTION, RAISE SEVERAL POSSIBILITIES. EIGHT BY-ELECTIONS TO FILL HOUSE VACANCIES ARE ALREADY SCHEDULED FOR NEXT OCTOBER 16. THERE ARE SEVEN OTHER HOUSE VACANCIES TO BE FILLED. GNPPPIUK VERS # SUGGEST

LIBERALS MAY USE THESE BY-ELECTIONS TO TAKE SOUNDINGS. IF RESULTS ARE FAVORABLE, TRUDEAU COULD CALL AN ELECTION FOR DECEMBER. THIS PROSPECT, IN EMBASSY VIEW, IS UNLIKELY, AS LONG, COLD CANADIAN WINTER DOES NOT GIVE RISE TO BUOYANT VOTER MOOD. WINTER ELECTIONS HAVE NOT BEEN CALLED SINCE 1921.

5. TRUDEAU COULD DISSOLVE PARLIAMENT IN SUMMER (AS HE DID IN 1972) FOR FALL ELECTIONS, PERHAPS TO COINCIDE
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WITH OCTOBER 16 BY-ELECTIONS.

6. AS HE INDICATED TO HOUSE, HE COULD WAIT UNTIL NEXT SPRING, CLOSE TO JULY 1979 END OF HIS FIVE YEAR MANDATE. THIS WOULD BE UNUSUAL IN PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM WHERE INCUMBENT GOVERNMENT PREFERS MANEUVERING ROOM FOR ELECTION CALL. IT COULD, HOWEVER, BE DICTATED BY CONTINUING OR EVEN WORSENING LIBERAL PROSPECTS REFLECTED BY POLLS.

7. WITH SUMMER ELECTIONS OFF, HOUSE SHOULD REMAIN IN SESSION THROUGH JUNE AND POSSIBLY LATER. AT MAY 4 PRESS CONFERENCE, TRUDEAU STATED THAT, WITHOUT SUMMER ELECTIONS, "WE WOULD AIM FOR THE END OF JUNE AND TRY NOT TO OVERLAP TOO MUCH INTO JULY BUT THAT IS NOT A PROMISE."

8. GOVERNMENT'S CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS ON NATIONAL UNITY WILL BE MOST PROMINENT PIECE OF HOUSE LEGISLATION. IN EARLY MAY, TRUDEAU INDICATED THAT GOVERNMENT WOULD INTRODUCE PROPOSALS IN HOUSE IF SUMMER ELECTIONS WERE NOT CALLED. REPORTEDLY, DIFFERENCES WITHIN GOVERNMENT OVER CONTENT OF PROPOSALS HAD PREVENTED EARLIER INTRODUCTION. WITHOUT ELECTION EXCUSE, GOVERNMENT MUST NOW

SETTLE REMAINING DIFFERENCES (IF ANY) AND PUT THE PACKAGE BEFORE THE HOUSE.

9. OTHER SIGNIFICANT HOUSE BUSINESS INCLUDES THE FOLLOWING: AMENDMENTS TO BANK ACT AND ANTI-COMBINES INVESTIGATIONS ACT; LEGISLATION AUTHORIZING NATIONWIDE REFERENDUMS ON CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTIONS; AND AMENDMENTS TO CANADIAN CRIMINAL CODE.

10. COMMENT: FAILURE TO CALL SUMMER ELECTION WILL BE WIDELY INTERPRETED AS SIGN OF SERIOUS LACK OF POPULAR SUPPORT FOR TRUDEAU GOVERNMENT. APRIL GALLUP POLL DEMONSTRATED REMARKABLE DROP IN LIBERAL POPULARITY (REF B) AND ELECTION POSTPONEMENT SUGGESTS GOVERNMENT BELIEVES CONFIDENTIAL

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IT IS IN DEEP TROUBLE WITH THE VOTERS. IF ELECTIONS ARE HELD IN FALL, INTERVENING PERIOD MAY PROVIDE ONLY MINIMUM OF GOOD NEWS FOR LIBERALS, THOUGH GLOOMY STATE OF THE ECONOMY, WHICH IS OVERRIDING CONCERN OF THE ELECTORATE, MAY EASE SOMEWHAT.

11. TRUDEAU COULD DRASTICALLY RESHUFFLE CABINET, WHICH HAS PARTICULARLY WEAK IMAGE. NEW FACES WOULD IMPROVE PARTY'S ELECTORAL PROSPECTS, BUT IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT NEW MEMBERS WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE THEIR MARK BEFORE ELECTIONS, WHETHER IN FALL OR NEXT SPRING. IN ANY CASE, MOMENTUM IS NOW CLEARLY WITH TORY PARTY. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN HOW PUBLIC WILL REACT TO TORY LEADER JOE CLARK IN HIS SUDDEN NEW ROLE AS A POTENTIAL FRONT-RUNNER. ENDERS

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